

FINANCE COMMITTEE -2/23/09

Senate Bill 933, Section 7

Testimony by:

Tony Polito, Director Group Sales, Holiday Inn Stamford Downtown

Good afternoon Senator Daily, Representative Staples, and members of the Finance Committee. My name is Tony Polito, Director of Group Sales at Holiday Inn Stamford Downtown, and I am here to testify on Senate Bill 933 dealing with the Film and Digital Media Incentive Program.

Speaking on behalf of my hotel – and frankly, the whole state tourism industry, I'd like to say that, particularly in these difficult times, **we need the tax credits** for the film industry.

The Holiday Inn Stamford Downtown has been significantly impacted by the film industry. In the past two years, we have had over 60,000 room nights of film business. **60,000 Room nights** - that is a huge number of rooms that would not have been here. That translates to over four and a half million dollars in two years.

It was just a few years ago that our hotel languished and was put up for sale. And then the film industry came in. As we prospered, we found new owners. Specifically because of our increased film revenues, the owners decided to undergo a *twenty million dollar renovation*. Our renovation enabled us to employ local contractors, purchase local materials, and keep local people working – **130 construction workers for a full year!** These are jobs *created* by the tax credit.

Of course, the benefits go way beyond our hotel. I have directly seen the impact on the other hotels, restaurants, bars, car rental companies and so many other businesses. While many hotels have served as a home to the industry, even those that didn't have film rooms benefited from the huge compression in the market. It allowed these other hotels to fill more rooms and charge higher room rates which, naturally, equated to *higher occupancy taxes* for the State. **Everybody wins.**

Over the past few weeks, I have given site visits to several decision makers for upcoming movie shoots and they all asked me about the tax credits going away. The very possibility that Connecticut might revoke the credits is impacting their decisions about whether or not they choose Connecticut. I am told we have already lost one film because of this chilling effect. We will continue to lose this business to other locations if the credits disappear - this is not speculation, *this is fact.*

With this current economic downturn, this is not the time to cut a program that has done so much to stimulate the economy, create jobs, and *build tax revenues for the State.*

Thank you for your time and consideration on this matter.